

Now, I would like to ask the Superintendent to come up for remarks, and then we'll have the coach say a thing or two.

General, it's good to see you again.

NOTE: The President spoke at 6:30 p.m. in the Rose Garden at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Lt. Gen. Tad J. Oelstrom, USAF, Superintendent, and Fisher DeBerry, football coach, U.S. Air Force Academy.

Remarks at a Reception for Senator Mary L. Landrieu

May 9, 2000

I think that young is a relative term. [*Laughter*] I've decided that young is anybody today younger than I am. [*Laughter*]

Let me say, I want to thank Jim and Ann for having us in their beautiful, beautiful home. I love this place. I always love to come here. And I want to thank Mary and Frank and little Connor, who I knew even before he was here. And I want to thank all of you for being here for Mary. A lot of you must feel old, you come—you do all these things over and over again. So I thank you on behalf of Senator Landrieu and Senator Daschle and Senator Lieberman and Senator Breaux and Senator Lincoln and Senator Edwards. And Congressman Jefferson, thank you for being there for us.

I can't help but tell you, we did this great event for China today, where President Ford and President Carter came, and Henry Kissinger came. And he always sounds like God with a German accent. [*Laughter*] Maybe God has a German accent, for all I know. [*Laughter*] And Jim Baker—and they all gave great talks. And we talked, and I looked out there, and I realized that there are all these former Secretaries of State, Secretaries of the Treasury, National Security Advisers, chairmen of the Foreign Relations Committee of the House and Senate, Chairmen of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. It was the most—Trade Ambassadors—the most astonishing group of Americans.

And Gerald Ford got up and started talking about a vote he cast in 1949 for trade with China that was joined in by John Kennedy, Richard Nixon, Carl Albert, and Albert Gore, Sr. And I realized that I was

there with people that represented the last 50 years of American history. And then I realized there was one person there that represented the whole 20th century, Mike Mansfield, who is 97 or 98 now. Didn't tell the truth about his age when he was 15 and talked his way into the Marines in World War I. And then he came home and studied Asian-Pacific affairs, became a professor at Montana, became a Congressman, a Senator, President Kennedy's Senate majority leader, a post he held for about 14 years, I think, a long time anyway. Then President Carter appointed him Ambassador to Japan.

And when Mary said I was young, it reminded me of a story. Shortly after I became President, when my mentor, Senator Fullbright, was still alive—he was 87 and Mike Mansfield was 91, and they had lunch together one day. And the next day Senator Fullbright came to see me. He was hitting us all up at the time, and he was still in great shape then. And Mike Mansfield looked at him and said, "Now, Bill, how old are you again?" He said, "I'm 87." And Mansfield said, "Oh, to be 87 again." [*Laughter*] So this youth, you know, it's a relative thing.

I will be very brief. First of all, I first met Mary Landrieu when she was a very young State representative. And I was a young Governor, and neither one of us looked our age. And she still looks younger than she is, and I now look more than my age. [*Laughter*] But I thought she was great when I first met her. I always loved her daddy, from the time I worked with President Carter and his administration when I was Attorney General in my home State. And I've known her a long time. And I thought when she ran for the Senate that if she could be elected, she would be uncommonly effective.

Senator Breaux worked hard for her; Congressman Jefferson did; Mayor Morial of New Orleans did; and I certainly did. And it all worked out pretty well, and she has exceeded even my very high expectations.

I think sometime in the next day or two, the House of Representatives is going to pass a House version of this bill that she and others have been working on for a long time, to create a permanent conservation fund that could literally change the face of hundreds

of American communities and give us a permanent conservation legacy in America, the likes of which we have never had before. That's quite an achievement for a first-term Senator. Now, we have to do it, but—[*ap-
plause*].

She is also, as you heard, supporting the administration's initiative to get permanent normal trade relations with China. And we had that meeting today, and there's no point in me repeating what Gerald Ford and Jimmy Carter and all the others said, but I will tell you this. This is the most important national security vote we will make this year.

A lot of you here agree with this issue because you understand the economics of it. And as I pointed out today, most of the people who are against this are against it out of their frustration or their anxiety about globalization, generally, or their frustration because China keeps doing things they don't like in human rights, or they don't like the way the World Trade Organization operates or some other reason. It has nothing to do with whether or not this is or is not in our economic interests or our national security interests.

But this is an easy vote for a Democrat to say no to. And that's another reason I'm here, because Mary Landrieu says yes, because it is a significantly important vote. And we will be paying the price for a decade if we fail to adopt this. And we could start paying the price within a matter of months. It is a profoundly important issue to the world that our children and grandchildren will live in. And so I'm here for that reason.

And the third thing I want to say is that Mary and a lot of her colleagues have supported our efforts to raise education standards. One of the things that bothered me when I ran for President was that people, even people who were supporting me, they wanted to vote for change. They thought I had a lot of energy, but a lot of them, frankly, didn't believe we'd make any difference. They had been so disappointed for so long and heard so much political hot air that they didn't think we could make a difference. They didn't think things could be better.

And—welcome, Senate Robb. Thank you for being here. You'll forgive me for being impertinent. If you hadn't given him a con-

tribution, I hope you'll give him one, too. [*Laughter*] If ever a person deserved to be reelected, he does. And he's going to be, and you might as well help him because he needs your help.

Well, anyway, the thing that bothered me, even in my campaign there were people who thought, well, I like old Clinton's ideas, but you know, we can't really turn this deficit around or make much of a difference in the economy or reduce the welfare rolls or—you know, I heard it all.

And now, you know what's happened. We've gone from deficit to surplus. When I leave office, we will have paid off \$355 billion of the national debt. And I'm very proud of that. And we'll have the longest economic expansion in history and the lowest unemployment in over 30 years, but also the lowest African-American and Hispanic unemployment ever recorded, the lowest female unemployment in 40 years, welfare rolls half the size they were when I took office, and 8 years of declining crime.

Now, what's the point here? We don't have an excuse not to do our best anymore, because we know that our common challenges are like all other problems: They do yield to intelligent effort.

And the reason education is so important—I took this education tour last week, and I don't want to bore you with the whole thing, but I'll just give you three examples. I went to the first charter school in the country, which is a public school set up outside the normal rules and regulations to serve a specific population or to pursue a specific education mission. And if they do well, they can stay in business. If they're not, they're supposed to have their charter jerked. That's the whole idea, that they're super accountable.

Now, they haven't all worked well. We've had problems with one or two here. But you should know that when I ran for President, there was one; today there are 1,700. Mary's voted to help me create more. Overall, they've done better than average schools, and they're vastly oversubscribed. People want to get into them.

And I visited this school in St. Paul, Minnesota, where there are over 100 kids who

have had terrible problems in their lives, terrible problems in school. They were all in school. None of them were dropping out. There were no violence problems, no drug problems, no nothing. They were showing up every day and learning, and they felt like they had a home. And they were performing at a high level.

I went to Columbus, Ohio, to a school in a very poor neighborhood, where they—in Columbus, they've got 55 of these 100,000 teachers we got out. And we've been attacked by the Republicans. We got attacked by their nominee for President. They say we're trying to micromanage the school system. The people met me, everybody from the superintendent on down, to thank me for the fact that we were giving them teachers and the money had to go for teachers in the early grades. They've gone from 25 average class size down to 15.

And in this one school, in a very poor neighborhood, in one year they went from 10 percent of the kids reading at or above grade level to 45 percent, 10 percent of the kids doing math at or about grade level to 33 percent, 10 percent of the kids doing science at or above grade level to 30 percent—in one year. And they have two of those teachers.

And then I went to Owensboro, Kentucky. Four years ago the Congress required the States—first we required the States to set up school standards. Then we required the States to identify schools that weren't making it and to come up with a strategy to fix them. Kentucky got out there early. Four years ago they identified 170 failing schools. Within 2 years, 91 percent were off the failure list.

This school I visited had two-thirds of its children eligible for the free or reduced school lunch program. And they had one of those teachers we required to lower class size in the early grades. Listen to this. In 4 years, here's what they did—two-thirds of the kids on free or reduced lunch. They went from 12 percent to 57 percent reading at or above grade level. They went from 5 percent to 70 percent doing math at or above grade level. They went from 0 to 64 percent doing science at or above grade level. They ranked 18th in the entire State of Kentucky in academic achievement. Ten of the 20 best grade

schools in Kentucky now have over half the kids eligible for free or reduced lunch. Race and income are not destiny. And we can also turn the schools around and give everybody excellence in education in this country. And that's another thing that brought me here tonight.

Now, this is the last thing I want to say. You want to know how this Presidential election is going to come out, how these races for the Senate and House are going to come out? It depends upon what people think the election is about. Whatever they decide the question is will determine the answer.

What do you think it's about? You don't remember anything else I say, you remember this. I think it should be about, what are we going to do with this moment of promise? I think the answer to the question should be: We're going to meet the big challenges and seize the big opportunities. How are we going to do it? We're going to do it not by doing just what I've done but by changing in the direction we're moving and not taking a U-turn on economic policy, on education policy, on any of these other policies.

So what do you think the election is about? Do you really believe it's about making the most of this moment? What does that mean? It means taking on the big challenges and opportunities. How should we do it? We ought to keep changing in the direction that brought us here.

Now if people believe that, then Al Gore will be elected President. We'll pick up seats in the Senate. We'll win the House back. And within no time at all, the Democrats will be rewarded by the American people for the good governance they have brought. That is really the issue.

But to do it, we have to keep meeting the challenges every day. We can't duck the hard votes, like this China vote. We've got to show up, be counted, and deliver for the American people.

I hope you will share this with people. Somebody asks you why you came here tonight, tell them you love Mary Landrieu, just like I do; you think she's done a great job; but you don't want to see America blow the most terrific opportunity we have had in my lifetime to prove we can build the future of

our dreams for our children. And we've got to have people like her to do it.

Thank you, and God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 7:45 p.m. at a private residence. In his remarks, he referred to reception hosts James and Ann Free; Senator Landrieu's husband, Frank Snellings, and their son, Connor; former Secretaries of State Henry Kissinger and James A. Baker III; Mayor Marc H. Morial of New Orleans, LA; and Gov. George W. Bush of Texas.

Remarks at a Reception for Senator Daniel K. Akaka

May 9, 2000

The President. Well, thank you very much. Aloha.

Audience members. Aloha!

The President. And to Danny and Millie and all of you, thank you so much for having me here. Senator Daschle, thank you for being here. And I'd like to acknowledge our great friend, a former Member of the House of Representatives, Norm Mineta. Thank you for coming, Norm, and being here with your friends and your extended family.

I want to tell you that I'm here for two reasons tonight, besides the fact that I've never had a bad day in Hawaii. [Laughter] And I knew that if I came here tonight, Danny would do as much as he could to simulate Hawaii. You know I would have music. I'd have a lei. People would say "aloha." Everybody would be relaxed. And by the time I left, no matter what I was worried about, I'd be in a good mood. And sure enough, that's happened.

The second reason I'm here is in behalf of one of the finest people in the United States Senate and one of the most popular people in the entire Congress. Dan Akaka is not only a good Senator, he is a good man. And I have yet to meet the first human being who didn't love him who knew him. And I want to thank him for being my friend.

The third reason I'm here is because he asked me, and I owe him. [Laughter]

You know, there was this—you heard, Senator Daschle said all those nice things about my service as President—there was a really funny article—I was reading Hillary this arti-

cle—you know, when you think you're about to get good press, read it to your spouse, and they'll find a way to bring it down. [Laughter] So I said, "Look here, here's this article. It says I have really high job approval ratings. And if it weren't for '93 and '94, they'd be the highest average ratings since people have been taking polls." And Hillary said, "Well, of course. In '93 and '94 you made all the hard decisions that gave you the high job approval ratings in '95 and afterward."

And if you think about it—I said it in a casual way, I'm serious—in 1993, when I presented an economic plan to cut the deficit in half and to get this country moving again and get interest rates down, we didn't get a single vote from the other party. They all said that it was going to throw the country into recession. And if anybody—anybody—in our party in either House had changed their vote, it would have been defeated. We would not have enjoyed the economic recovery we have had, and I would not have enjoyed the political recovery I enjoyed after 1994.

But the most important thing is, the American people now have the longest economic expansion in history, over 21 million new jobs, unemployment rate under 4 percent for the first time since early 1970. And when I leave office, we will have paid off—paid off—\$355 billion of the national debt in the last 3 years. Now, all because he was there. We lose one vote, and it's history. The whole last 8 years are a totally different story.

It was almost the same when we had to pass the crime bill to do more to keep guns out of the hands of children and criminals, put more police officers on the street. You probably saw the report Sunday, crime down 8 years in a row—and the leadership of the other party overwhelmingly negative on the Brady bill, on banning the cop-killer bullets, on the assault weapons ban, on putting 100,000 police on the streets, all of those things. He was there.

And in education, I just want to say, you know, that's a story that is not as well-known, college-going up 10 percent, reading and math scores almost up a full grade level. But in the areas where people have taken seriously the legislation that I proposed 4 years ago, that every State had to identify every